ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 23

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
29 August 1979

GRNL SALT

OPINION AND COMMENTARY

SALT II: unspectacular but worth the risk

By Nish Jamgotch Jr.

SALT II aims to prevent the Soviets from upsetting the strategic balance which they will assuredly do if they continue spending militarily as they have since talks began in 1969. In debating the treaty, three issues must be faced: trust; verification; and contrasting Soviet and American defense requirements.

Trust is really a false issue. It is a principle of international politics that, because of an absence of trust, nations must negotiate interests. What is agreed upon is not trust *per se* but that each party ensures self-interest through compromise and going along with the interests of the other. It follows that international agreements can only be as firm as the self-interest of the parties in observing them. Indeed, if genuine international trust were to exist (which it does not), it would very likely make international agreements unnecessary.

In the absence of trust, verification by both sides is essential to the treaty. What is needed is the assurance that if one side cheats enough to make a difference, the other side could know in time to renounce the treaty.

Missile tests inevitably transmit electronic signals and other data back to the ground. Both sides in monitoring each other's tests can learn what is being tested. These telemetry emissions are required for verification of the most essential SALT provisions. The Soviets have agreed not to garble them or put them in code. If they comply with this provision, verification is achievable even without the monitoring stations lost in Iran – a small fraction of the US intelligence capability and only incidental to verifying compliance.

We err when we assume without factual basis that the Soviets will cheat, or that, if they do, they cannot be caught; or that, even if they are caught, it will signify irretrievable loss for the United States. In any case, if the Soviets intend to cheat and intimidate the United States, logic dictates that they, not US intelligence, should tell US leaders directly. (No one is intimidated by weapons not known to exist.)

The question, however, is not whether nations can cheat. They can. But the consequences of getting caught are grave. What is at stake is a long-term negotiating process in stages which can be terminated at any time. If either nation wishes to kill the process, it can risk doing so by cheating, thereby destroying its credibility in future negotiations. This is a powerful force for compliance.

What are the relative strengths of the United States and the Soviet Union? Both Pentagon and CIA studies show that the strategic balance, although evolving, is solid. American retaliatory capability will increase in the 1980s with the Trident submarine and air-launched cruise missiles. Americans clearly lead in nuclear warheads and sophisticated guidance systems.

But comparative Soviet and American force levels are not the central issue. The defense requirements of the United States and the Soviet Union are markedly different. Since the days of cold war bipolarity in world affairs, the distribution of power has shifted against the Soviets. American-Soviet preeminence has given way to a world of multiple power centers: US, USSR, EC (European Community), People's Republic of China, and Japan. Four of the five are historically anti-Soviet, three with frontiers on the USSR.

China, which deploys some two million men along the Siberian front, has four times the population of the Soviet Union and twice the natural increase. Moreover, no quantities of weapons added to American or Soviet arsenals can compensate for the qualitative challenge to Soviet security posed by the $20 billion Sino-Japanese trade pact of February, 1978, designed to develop an advanced industrial economy and modern military capability for China.

Thus, years of accelerated Soviet military build-up, absorbing 13-15 percent of its GNP, must be seen in the context of geopolitical realities in Europe and Asia – perceived vulnerability on all frontiers. After years of breakneck military investment and the attainment of strategic parity with the US at enormous impairment to its economy, the Soviet Union is no more secure today than it was a decade ago. Indeed, it is the colossal irony of our age – and the affliction of superpowers – that spending seems to beget more spending rather than more security.

For Americans, the problem runs deeper. Citizen disillusionment with foreign policy and the unprecedented lack of consensus on security priorities make SALT II appear to be a gamble. Bipartisan foreign policy has lapsed. Congressional leadership fails to lead. American politics today is dominated by powerful, highly financed, narrowly guided interest groups. More than ever before since World War II, the US must conduct foreign policy without national unity on the subject.

Consequently, President Carter's task extends far beyond a mere ceiling on strategic delivery systems. Such is the paradox of our time that, precisely when the US is more interdependent with the rest of the world than ever before, citizen interest in international relations is minimal. And this includes the current generation of college students who are tomorrow's dicisionmakers.

Sound foreign policy cannot be devised without first undertaking to understand our changing world. SALT II will not eliminate military problems faced by the signatories. Alas, it will not prevent the evolution of newer, more lethal weapons at steadily escalating costs. It will not guarantee fundamental revisions in Soviet communism, the merits of human rights notwithstanding. It cannot end ideological incompatibility or the pursuit of conflicting strategies around the globe.

The best we can hope for is to moderate the competition, reduce the level of hostility, stabilize strategic parity (called "essential equivalence"), de-escalate overkill capacity, and continue to clarify the security problems and intentions of each side.

To be sure, SALT II is not very spectacular, but it is certainly worth the risk, because no conceivable foreign policy objectives warrant thermonuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Nish Jamgotch is professor of political science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and a specialist on international politics and American-Soviet relations.